DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 024 667 TE 000 528

By- Burress, Lee A., Jr.
Censorship and the Public Schools.
Pub Date Jun 65
Note- 10p.
Journal Cit- American Library Association Bulletin; v59 n6 p491-9 June 1965
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.60
Descriptors- Academic Freedom, *Censorship, Critical Reading, *English Instruction, Interdisciplinary Approach, *Literary Discrimination, *Literature, Public Education, *Public Schools, Reading Material Selection, Sanctions, School Policy, Teacher Attitudes, Teacher Education, Teacher Participation, Teacher Workshops, Teaching Methods
Identifiers- Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English

Increased militancy of teachers and instructional improvement leading to a more individualized selection of reading material may have spurred censors into increased activity. To prepare teachers to counteract censorship, further studies, such as the one by the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, and interdisciplinary cooperation are needed. Sanctions against offending school systems should be considered as well as summer workshops which stress the importance of intellectual freedom. Censorship from within the schools could perhaps be eliminated if traditional assumptions about teaching literature (that students must know about an established canon of literary works) were replaced by an attempt to produce intelligent, critical readers. The existing and all too prevalent "faith in censorship" should be replaced by "faith in literature," for literature can not only prepare the student for his inevitable encounter with evil in life but also elevate his taste. (JS)

E20.4
NMB

Lib. Sci.

American Library Association

AA BULLETIN

ED 024637

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

University of Illinois
JUN 17 1965

"... free men and free inquiry are inseparable."

— President Johnson, commenting on Edward R. Murrow's beliefs

TE 000 528

Supporting the Library Bill of Rights

June 1965

Censorship and the Public Schools

by Lee A. Burress, Jr.

I am glad to have the opportunity to discuss a subject of increasing concern to teachers. While objective evidence is lacking, it seems to teachers that the pressure of censorship is a growing part of school life today. If articles on censorship in education journals constitute a reliable index, teachers are much more concerned today than thirty years ago. When *Education Index* commenced publication in 1929, one article a year on censorship was published. In the most recent issues of *Education Index*, there are lengthy bibliographies on censorship. While to some degree, no doubt, this increased attention by teachers is the result of professional hubris at having their judgment questioned, there are substantial grounds for their fear that the curriculum may be weakened by the increasing censorship pressures.[1]

A brief look at the schools from a historical perspective may aid in understanding the recent increase in censorship.

The public schools have undergone much change in the last 65 years. Prior to 1900, it was not uncommon for secondary schoolteachers to engage in creative scholarly work. It is not unusual to find, if you study the local history of a given region, that the first collection of the flora and fauna or the geology of that area was made by a professor in the local academy. While much of this work was amateurish, no doubt, it was inspired by genuine intellectual curiosity and considerable breadth of vision.

With the rapid rise of high school populations in this century, the pressing need to find staff brought into the schools teachers who frequently had neither the inclination nor the time to pursue intellectual concerns. The buildings were not equipped with laboratories or libraries that might facilitate an atmosphere of intellectual pursuit. The small Kansas high school from which I was graduated in the mid-thirties had a few dusty volumes in the back of the study hall. Few students and instructors paid more than casual attention to the books there. The principal science was biology, taught by the football coach, who did little more than take his students through the text.

Let me not overemphasize the negative features of American secondary education. Considering the limited funds, the rapid rise in student population, and the continually overworked staffs, the idealistic faith of countless teachers in the possibilities of education doubtless accomplished many miracles. There was, however, great need to do more than provide buildings and teachers of any kind for the great mass of secondary school students, and we have, in fact, made much progress in elevating the intellectual level of the public schools.

One by one, most of the states have come to the requirement of a four-year college degree for all teachers, which in itself has begun to change the characteristics of the school staff. Tenure in many school systems has been a factor in permitting the development of a more independent school staff.

• *Professor Burress is chairman of the English Department, Wisconsin State University, Stevens Point. He is active in the National Council of Teachers of English.*

[1] See the following study for a report on the interrelationships of literature, censorship, and the school curriculum in Ireland: Marion Witt, "Great Art Beaten Down: William Butler Yeats on Censorship," *College English*, XIII (February 1952), p. 248–58.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY A.L.A. and Lee A. Burress, Jr. TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U. S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

Critics such as Professor Arthur Bestor, Admiral Hyman Rickover, and James Bryant Conant have focused attention on the schools in ultimately helpful ways. Federal legislation, such as the Smith-Hughes Act of the 1920's and the NDEA of the 1950's, has helped raise standards for the teaching staff and has significantly improved instruction.

It is, I believe, the improvement in instruction which has made censorship perhaps more of a problem in recent years than it may have been in the past. While censorship has always been a problem and no doubt will continue to be one until we have a more enlightened society than I foresee in the near future, a good school system in our present society probably might expect to have more trouble than a poor one.

One of the instructional improvements of immediate concern to censorship is in the use of books other than texts. A text is essential for a poorly prepared teacher, who would not know otherwise what to teach. If you put a text in his hand, he knows what to do. But the well-prepared teacher does not need to rely on the text. It has been a natural accompaniment of the rise of teacher preparation that much more use has been made in the schools of nontextbooks. It seems probable to me, in short, that the improvement in preparation and the great increase in the use of genuine books, instead of the artificial, predigested, intellectual sawdust which passes for texts in so many subjects, account in part for the rise in censorship. There was nothing to censor in my small Kansas high school library. In fact, there was little to read.

Another factor accounting in part for the rise in censorship is the increasing militancy of teachers. While their militancy is for the most part, and legitimately so, over matters of wages and working conditions, it tends also to express itself, I am glad to see, in matters of curricular import and book use. Not long ago, for example, a Wisconsin school board member who belonged to a radical right-wing organization objected to the use of the *New York Times Book Review* magazine in the school. One young teacher wrote a letter to the local paper protesting vigorously against this attempted censorship. The teacher won community support, and the matter was dropped. I was impressed by the willingness of the teacher to protest in this vigorous, and public, way. Such actions are not yet as frequent as I would wish, but I think they may be more likely today than they were some years ago.

The militancy of the teachers may also be seen in greater use of contemporary and controversial books than was true in the past. It is easy to be overimpressed with one's own times, and I don't know what yardsticks you can use in these matters. But in any case, censorship studies in Wisconsin suggest, and individual reports from across the country confirm, that teachers are aware of and are inclined to use much contemporary and frequently controversial literature. Representative samples from Wisconsin include James Jones's *The Thin Red Line*, Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, and Remarque's *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*.

Whether these speculations have some measure of validity, I leave for you to decide, but it seems possible that the improvement in teacher preparation and in the status and working conditions of the profession and the generally higher level of intellectual achievement in the schools may account to some degree for an increased incidence of censorship.[2]

A study in Wisconsin

That the pressure of censorship is a prominent part of school life today seemed clearly indicated by a recent study of censorship in Wisconsin.[3] The Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English sent 1640 questionnaires to Wisconsin administrators and teachers. Slightly over 600 were returned. Of these, about one-third contained evidence which led to the major conclusion of the study, that a substantial proportion of the teachers of Wis-

[2] Other reasons are offered by Fred Millett in "The Vigilantes," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, XI (March 1954), p. 47–60. These include mass education, only half-successful, and cold war fears. David Riesman suggests the class conflicts as a cause in "Some Observations on Intellectual Freedom," *The American Scholar*, XXIII (Winter 1953–54), p. 15ff.

[3] Lee A. Burress, Jr., "How Censorship Affects the Schools," *Wisconsin English Journal*, VI (October 1963), p. 6-28.

consin feel the continuing presence of censorship pressures and have experienced, or expect to experience, an overt expression of that pressure.

An interesting feature of the study was the widely different reactions of teachers to the pressure of censorship. I spoke earlier of the militancy of teachers. Not all teachers are militant, by any means. Many are unbelievably intimidated. Their timidity causes them to anticipate every possible objection and to attempt to insure that no one will ever have the slightest grounds to object to anything they do, nor has it occurred to them that there is anything wrong with this attitude.

One teacher wrote, "We older, experienced teachers are well aware of community standards, tastes, and limits of acceptance, and therefore we successfully steer our course. Younger teachers are guided by the principal and librarian." The younger teachers in some cases gratefully accept such guidance, as did one who wrote concerning *The Catcher in the Rye*, "It was a librarian who warned me about the above book." Other teachers, however, are not happy about such compromises. One of them wrote: "The community objects to what teachers consider mature literature. The administration and other teachers know that the objection exists. Since we do not get fully backed in other areas, and since we are told to be careful how we express ourselves—we must not sound like complainers—I assume that I should tread lightly in this area also. If the administration openly defended a teacher's choices, and if they let the new teacher know that she need not fear for her job in case of trouble over chosen books, I would be braver."[4]

There are braver teachers, and these frequently speak up, either to their administrators or to their school boards. During the period of time covered by the Wisconsin study, so far as I know, every teacher in Wisconsin who made an effort to defend his book choices was able to maintain the right. This is not invariably the case, and teachers have sometimes paid rather severe prices for insisting upon intellectual freedom in the schools. Their willingness to do so is a hopeful sign both for the schools and the welfare of the country as a whole.

Why some teachers are self-reliant and militantly insist upon professionally acceptable working conditions and other teachers do not is a puzzling question. There is need for much study of the conditions that develop self-reliance in making informed professional judgments. Little attention is paid in such matters in present curricula devoted to teacher training. In fact, teacher-training programs are more likely to emphasize the importance of public relations and conformity to the best interests of the school as an institution than the development of professionally competent and independent personalities. In spite of this lack, a fair share of present teachers are increasingly insistent upon exercising their best professional judgments in selecting and using books.

The Wisconsin study suggested that publicity is a useful weapon for protecting intellectual freedom in the public schools. Much censorship is done very quietly; in fact, the word "quiet" showed up frequently in the returns, along with such phrases as "cautious," "reasonable discretion," "given out judiciously," "nothing is said openly about such a policy," "to suggest that teachers be a bit careful."[5]

But where teachers asked why, or insisted that public explanations be given for the removal of a book, then the book was much less likely to be removed. The Wisconsin study itself I think may be helpful, for it aroused some publicity in Wisconsin and focused attention on the problem.

There ought to be more studies of this sort, even if they repeat previous work. For one thing, it may be possible to establish guidelines, to learn something about varying degrees of incidence of censorship, and to suggest better methods of preparing teachers for dealing with censorship.

Such studies also show the capricious and ridiculous nature of censorship. Examples from Wisconsin are such objections as the following:

> Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* was objected to because, asserted a Wisconsin clergyman, Shaw was an atheist.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

A Bell for Adano was objected to because it was alleged that it had a Russian author.
Crime and Punishment was objected to because it allegedly had too much profanity.
Failsafe was objected to for fear that it might undermine confidence in America's defense system.
Gone with the Wind was objected to because of Scarlett's immorality.
Chekhov's *Lady with the Dog* was objected to because it had a Russian author.
The Ox-Bow Incident was objected to because of its language.
Costain's *The Silver Chalice* was objected to because of the description of the character Helena in the novel.
The Atlantic Monthly was objected to because it allegedly had crude and sensational articles. *The New York Times Book Review* magazine was objected to because it allegedly contained obscenity.
Today's Health was objected to because it dealt with the birth of a baby.
In another case in Wisconsin, a teacher was prevented from using *To Kill a Mockingbird* because it wasn't a classic.[6]

To publish this kind of information seems a good way of using what Mark Twain called the human race's best weapon—laughter.

In addition to making studies and getting as much publicity as possible for attempted censorship actions, considerably more interdisciplinary cooperation is needed. The studies might well be cosponsored by various groups working together. A joint committee of the American Association of School Librarians and the National Council of Teachers of English is, in fact, currently considering a national study of censorship in the public schools. Hopefully, such studies might lead to action programs of various kinds.

For example, some educational groups have already considered the possibility of sanctions against school systems that fail to maintain satisfactory working conditions. The definition of satisfactory working conditions ought to be broadened to include intellectual freedom with special reference to book selection and book use. If such sanctions are imposed by interdisciplinary groups, they would be more effective than if by one group. For example, the English teachers find it hard to make official objections if a psychology teacher is fired for using a book objected to by the administration as did happen in Wisconsin. Of course, if there is no freedom for psychology teachers, there is not likely to be freedom for English teachers. But interdisciplinary action requires interdisciplinary cooperation.

There ought to be summer workshops on intellectual freedom, jointly sponsored by cooperating educational organizations, so that representative groups might work together. Rarely are public school teachers told in so many words that they have an obligation to work for intellectual freedom in the public schools. Such workshops would afford the opportunity to do just that. A workshop in Book Choice and Intellectual Freedom will be held at Wisconsin State University, Stevens Point, in July 1965.

Conflicts in the school

After discussing our posture, as it were, when facing the pressures of censorship from the outer world, let me turn your attention to problems that arise from conflicts within the institution of the school.

I was unhappily surprised to discover that a fair share of the problems that librarians have with censorship comes from teachers, who rather frequently disapproved of such books as *The Catcher in the Rye, Children of Sanchez,* a book on juvenile delinquency called *Delinquency: Sickness or Sin,* Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms,* Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead,* Michener's *Hawaii,* Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Les Miserables,* Golding's *Lord of the Flies,* Orwell's *1984,* Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and *The Pearl,* Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird,* Henry G. Felsen's *Two and the Town,* the magazine *America,* the magazine *Ebony* (probably for racial reasons), some issues of *Life* magazine, and some issues of the *Wisconsin Engineer* (because of its rather broad jokes, which were torn out before the magazine was made available).[7]

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

Incidentally, since the publication of the report I have had two or three oral reports of teachers stealing an allegedly immoral book to keep it from circulation, in one case stealing the book two or three times as the librarian bought additional copies to replace the stolen one.

On the other hand, a different group of teachers have had censorship troubles with no doubt different librarians who either refused to buy or removed from circulation such books as the Bible, *Brave New World*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, Uris' *Exodus*, Warren Beck's *The Final Score*, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Jon Rose's *Peppercorn Days*, Ruark's *Something of Value*, Conrad Richter's *The Town*, Felsen's *Two and the Town*, and such periodicals as *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Life*, *Photography*, and *Theatre Arts*.[8] One Wisconsin director of school library services refuses to buy any book which deals with war or has the word "war" in the title.

While censorship pressures from these sources were relatively less severe than from sources outside the school, they compel our attention and force us to raise questions about our professional training and the degree to which we have established professional procedures for working together in the schools.

I believe that the problem posed here is partly a product of traditional methods of teaching literature. Censorship, both from without and from within the school, has as part of its ultimate source certain unexamined implications of the traditional approaches to literature. These approaches tend to objectify literature, to see it as an existent body of material classified by literary periods and nationality groups. The student's task is to learn as much as possible about this corpus, beginning perhaps with Homer's *Iliad* and ending practically with the established figures of the twentieth century. This is an impossible assignment, even for doctoral candidates; but at every level where literature is taught, the notion of covering the assigned body of material tends to govern the work of teaching.

This approach leads to the notion of an established canon, without which, it is believed, no one can be educated or literate. In fact, no one, or few persons, knows all the works in the canon, but each person compliments himself on what he knows and condemns those who do not know the works he knows. The coverage doctrine ignores the fact that no book is indispensable.

The notion of the indispensable book leads to the aesthetic heresy that to know about a book is as good as to know the book. The impossible teaching situations we create lead students and teachers to seek means of knowing about books without knowing books. Publishers meet this need with masterplots, college outline series, and periodicals devoted to the explication of various works. In response to student needs, the libraries stock such works.

With a series of outlines and notes, the student can learn the canon of the Romantic period or the seventeenth century; he can be supplied with the received opinion of the fashionable literary critics concerning the explication of the works under study. He may quite possibly earn a respectable grade from the course and yet read few or none of the works under study.

Professor Robert E. Spiller, one of our great contemporary literary historians, has recently written a regretful *apologia* for literary history, which might be consulted for a corrective to my no doubt biased views.[9] There is, however, sufficient truth in these charges to explain why many students are graduated from our colleges quite unable to read in any meaningful sense of the word. I don't mean they are illiterate; they are, as David Riesman said, "half-educated."[10] They cannot take a contemporary novel or poem and read it with a satisfactory understanding of the work's basic attitudes and implications. They may not, in fact, even be able to make accurate statements about the book's plot, let alone its themes. There is much complaint today about students' inability to write. A far more serious deficiency is their inability to read; ultimately, this deficiency is much more dangerous to literature, and to the Republic,

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] "Is Literary History Obsolete?" *College English*, XXIV (February 1963), p. 345–51.

[10] See footnote 2.

than inability to write.

A surprising number of the objectors to various works used in Wisconsin schools claimed to have read the works; if true, this contradicts our usual assumption that would-be censors do not read the books to which they object. But in fact these objectors have not really read the works in the sense of having some reasonable degree of understanding of the work's basic purpose, though they may in fact have looked at most or all of the words in the book. Moreover, many of them are presumably educated persons—college graduates and professional people. Clearly the many years of English every educated person receives failed for those people in the most elementary fashion. It did not teach them to read.[11]

The librarian and English teacher also suffer from our present distorted methods of teaching literature. If the task of the literary person is to know about a received canon of literary works, then these are the works that should be in the library and that should be taught. If a book is not in the canon, it should not be in the library nor should it be read. Thus, *The Wizard of Oz* is not in the canon, so the student has no chance to examine it. It is simply excluded.[12] But as Northrop Frye points out, "The belief that good and bad can be determined as inherent qualities is the belief that inspires censorship, and the attempt to establish grades and hierarchies in literature itself, to distinguish what is canonical from what is apocryphal, is really an 'aesthetic' form of censorship."[13]

[11] For a good illustration of a reading approach to *The Catcher in the Rye* as a preventative to censorship see W. C. Booth, "Censorship and the Values of Fiction," *English Journal*, LIII (March 1964), p. 155–64.

[12] *The Wizard of Oz* is not indexed in the following standard works of children's literature:

May Hill Arbuthnot, *Children and Books* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1957).

Charlotte S. Huck and Doris A. Young, *Children's Literature in the Elementary School* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1961).

Cornelia Meigs, Anne Eaton, Elizabeth Nesbitt, and Ruth Hill Viguers, *A Critical History of Children's Literature* (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

[13] Northrop Frye, "Criticism, Visible and Invisible," *College English*, XXVI (October 1964), p. 3–12.

Not a new idea

This is not a new idea. As Frye emphasizes, Milton in the *Areopagitica* insisted that the value of a work depended on the way it was used, not the work itself. "Milton remarked in *Areopagitica* that a wise man would make a better use of an idle pamphlet than a fool would of Holy Scripture, and this, I take it, is an application of the gospel principle that man is defiled not by what goes into him but by what comes out of him. The question of censorship is apparently based on an analogy between mental and physical nourishment, what is censorable being inherently poisonous."[14]

The notion that the censorable is poisonous is deeply imbedded in our society. While collecting Wisconsin proverbs, I found this saying, given to me by an elderly woman who said she had got it from a book more than sixty years ago. The proverb is this: "A poor book had best be burned to give place to a better or even to an empty shelf, for the fire destroys the poison and puts it out of the way of doing harm."

Many teachers and librarians accept this proverb as their working basis and attempt to teach or shelve only "good" books. Much question-begging goes on in this regard. Good books are those listed in the canon. The end of literary criticism is to determine whether a book is good or bad. After the critics have determined what classification to give a book, it may then be safely forgotten; whether it's on or off the shelf doesn't really matter, since it has been permanently labelled.

If we are to break into this unexamined circle of assumptions, a radically different approach to the teaching of English is necessary. The outline of such an approach is beginning to be visible in contemporary literary criticism, although I know as yet of no systematic or complete description. Some of the basic elements were described some years ago in Albert Guerard's *Preface to World Literature*. While the new curriculum in literature will certainly transcend the so-called "new critics," their contributions are an important source of the new curriculum. The fullest

[14] *Ibid.*

effort to describe the curricular implications of the new approaches is currently being made by Northrop Frye.[15] A conference recently held at Trinity College produced some of the most forward-looking thinking on the English curriculum now available. Several of the addresses may be read in *College English*, October 1964.

Though it is dangerous to attempt to summarize too precisely the outlines of a new curriculum, the principles of organization probably will not be historic or geographic, as is frequently true in literature study today, but will be based on the structures of literature itself, so that to teach the curriculum will be to teach the essential elements of literature and not of literary history, or a given culture, or history of ideas, or other important, but peripheral, subjects—peripheral, that is, to the central elements of literature, those structures by which the reader enters the imaginative world of the work of art.

An effort to embody the new approaches was made in the literature syllabus of the twenty institutes in English held at various American universities in the summer of 1962 under sponsorship of the College Entrance Examination Board. That syllabus, drawn up by a representative group of English teachers from across the country, was prefaced by this statement of purpose, written by Professor Helen White of the University of Wisconsin:

> The purpose of teaching literature in schools and colleges is to make the student aware of the power of great literature to illuminate human experience, and to give inexhaustible pleasure.
>
> The literary work is an ordered world, organized out of experience by the vision and discipline of the writer. To enter that world the student must be trained in thoughtful and sensitive reading, supported by essential knowledge of the cultural context and guided by each teacher's understanding of his class. The student must be put in possession of such indispensable tools of literary study as analysis of image, metaphor, and symbol, awareness of point of view, analysis of structure, and semantic examination of meaning and tone.[16]

That description makes clear that the purpose of literary study ought to be not knowledge about literature, but the possession of literature as a power to be used.

If the student is put in possession of the "indispensable tools of literary study," then he is able to discover for himself what he seeks in literature and is freed from the tyranny of the classroom, the lecture, the guides, and the established explications.

Such a program would minimize common reading assignments and would call for much more freedom of choice for the student. It would need much wider ranges of material, so that every student could find for himself the books suitable to his needs and tastes. Moreover, there is considerable evidence, as Professor G. Robert Carlsen, Lou LaBrant,[17] and others have pointed out, that such a program would come closer to making lifetime readers of our students than is presently the case.

Faith in freedom and literature

I hope I have not seemed to digress too far from our subject. If methods of teaching literature are related to the frequency with which educated people wish to censor literature, then the method of teaching may be worthy of notice in a discussion of censorship. But beyond this there is another issue, and that is the question of faith in freedom and in literature. If we could successfully make reasonably competent readers of most of our students, should we risk turning them loose to discover for themselves what the literary world has for them?

Many voices say no. There is a prosecuting attorney in Milwaukee who has made a political career by using legal means to attack what he regards as obscene literature. Examples might be multiplied; they include state supreme court justices running for office in

[15] In such articles as "Elementary Teaching and Elemental Scholarship," *PMLA*, LXXIX (May 1964), p. 11–18, and in his previously cited article on criticism, as well as generally in his works of literary criticism.

[16] Reprinted by permission of Modern Language Association from *The Commission on English 1962 Summer Institutes for English Teachers* (New York: Modern Language Association, 4 Washington Place, 1964), p. 40.

[17] Lou LaBrant, "The Use of Communication Media," Chapter VIII in Margaret Willis, *The Guinea Pigs After Twenty Years* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1961).

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Modern Language Assoc. TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U. S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

Wisconsin and elsewhere, policemen in Detroit, clergymen everywhere, large numbers of ordinary citizens, and many teachers and librarians. As did Plato, these people believe in varying degrees that the artist may disturb and upset society and should be controlled.

Other voices say yes, in freedom is our greatest safety. This was Milton's meaning in the *Areopagitica* when he said, "I care not for a cloistered virtue." Time shows us regularly that Milton was right.

A Wisconsin father wrote me that he objected to the bad books being read in the high schools. There are enough taverns around, he said; my children don't have to learn about evil from books. But a Wisconsin mother was far wiser, I think, when she thanked a Wisconsin teacher for recommending Nelson Algren's books to her son, for they caused him to lose his interest in taverns and striptease joints by revealing the tawdriness and life-destroying traps behind the sleazy, neon-lighted fronts.

That such an effect would always occur, we cannot know; but if Milton is right, it is better for young people to have the veil stripped off evil by such books than to meet evil, as most inevitably do, in its four-dimensional realities without the preparation that books can give them.

Mark Twain makes exactly the same point in his great short story, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg." Twain tells us of a community that prided itself on its honesty and so removed all temptations to dishonesty form its children. As Twain tells the story, inevitably temptation occurred, and, never having met it, most of the leading citizens fell in a humiliating way. The same theme appears in a short story by Graham Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," in which a Roman Catholic priest explains that he found his vocation because, as a child, he had been tempted to disloyalty toward his faith. Both of these stories agree with Milton that freedom is necessary for meaningfully virtuous life.

Moreover, we must not forget that faith in literature contradicts faith in censorship. Literary art contains its own energies for elevating the taste of the reader. If the imaginative power of literature does not compel the attention of the reader, nothing from outside will cause this compulsion. If the compulsion occurs, the energies resulting will lead the reader on from work to work, dissatisfied with anything less than the excitement that engagement with the literary work brings him.

A student writing of his first acquaintance with Mark Twain tells of his discovery of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. He stood at the librarian's desk reading *Tom Sawyer*, read it walking up the street to take the bus, read the book while riding the bus home, read, completely ignoring his mother's protests, all through the evening meal, and finished the book at last under the bedcovers with a flashlight. The energies released by the imaginative work created by Mark Twain took that student through every work of Twain's he could find in his local library and, we may guess, will take that student through many other books in the course of his life.

The story could be repeated again and again. Whittaker Chambers in *Witness* tells of the effect upon him of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*.

> How can anyone take seriously a man who says flatly that his life has been influenced by Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*? I understand. I can only answer that, behind its colossal failings, its melodrama, its windy philosophizing, its clots of useless knowledge, its overblown rhetoric and repellent posturings, which offend me, like everybody else, on almost every page, *Les Miserables* is a great act of the human spirit. And it is a fact that books which fall short of greatness sometimes have a power to move us greatly, especially in childhood when we are least critical and most forgiving, for their very failures confess their humanity.[18]

Whittaker Chambers is not the only witness to the ultimately elevating effect of even poor literature on the human spirit. Guerard illustrates the principle by referring to the young person who has access only to the cheap romantic novels of Ouida and Corelli.

> He will take delight in them; to him, they will be "art" and "literature"—an escape from the humdrum, a widening of experience, a field for

[18] Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 134. Reprinted by permission of the copyright holder, Random House, Inc.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Random House, Inc. TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U. S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

imagination. Even in their second-rate technique, he will find a fairly successful attempt to tell a connected, exciting story, to create characters, to use language with some effectiveness. These books, which we affect to despise, will come to him as a revelation of the magic land, with a force that even Shakespeare has lost for most of us. His misplaced enthusiasm would be proof of his taste for literature, since he could extract delight even out of such tawdry stuff. It would not be evidence of poor taste in literature, since, in our hypothesis, he had no access to anything better. In the same way, the first automobile brought into a backward country will be hailed as a wonder, however antiquated it may be. Be sure the purchaser will not cherish it *because* it is rattling and wheezy; he will overlook these blemishes, in the exhilaration of the added power and freedom that the new invention is bringing to him. In these cases, it is not taste that is deficient, but experience.[19]

Many a teacher has seen this process at work, slowly in some students, who may be detained by prolonged interest in one corridor of literature, more rapidly in others, who are driven on to find again the excitement they discovered earlier in works of literature that now seem immature. If the student has learned the most important fact of all, the exciting power that books contain, he will be driven by desire to find that excitement in books appropriate to his continuing years of growth and change. Emerson, in fact, true to his Augustinian heritage, saw it as a permanent principle of life that men are driven by a restless search for nothing less than the best and wrote in his poem "The Sphinx":

> The fiend that man harries
> Is love of the Best.[20]

The nature of imagination and of literature is such that we need not fear the results of free access to books. Let us teach our students to read, in the largest sense of the word, and let us fill our libraries with all the books we can, and let us then absent ourselves, tiptoeing as it were discreetly away.

[19] Albert Guerard, *Preface to World Literature* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1940), p. 92. Reprinted by permission of the copyright holder, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.

[20] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Poems* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1884), p. 11.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U. S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arbuthnot, May Hill. *Children and Books.* Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1957.

Booth, W. C. "Censorship and the Values of Fiction," *English Journal,* LIII (March 1964), p. 155–64.

Burress, Lee A., Jr. "How Censorship Affects the Schools," *Wisconsin English Journal,* VI (October 1963), p. 6–28.

Chambers, Whittaker. *Witness.* New York: Random House, 1952.

The Commission on English 1962 Summer Institutes for English Teachers. New York: Modern Language Association, 4 Washington Place, 1964.

Foulk, Robert D. "Criticism and the Curriculum I," *College English,* XXIV (October 1964), p. 23–29.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism.* Princeton: Princeton Univ. Pr., 1957.

———. "Criticism, Visible and Invisible," *College English,* XXVI (October 1964), p. 3–12.

———. *The Educated Imagination.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963.

———. "Elementary Teaching and Elemental Scholarship," *PMLA,* LXXIX (May 1964), p. 11–18.

Guerard, Albert. *Preface to World Literature.* New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1940.

Huck, Charlotte S., and Doris A. Young. *Children's Literature in the Elementary School.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1961.

LaBrant, Lou. "The Use of Communication Media," Chapter VIII in Margaret Willis, *The Guinea Pigs After Twenty Years.* Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Pr., 1961.

Meigs, Cornelia; Anne Eaton; Elizabeth Nesbitt; and Ruth Hill Viguers, *A Critical History of Children's Literature.* New York: Macmillan, 1953.

Millett, Fred. "The Vigilantes," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors,* XL (March 1954), p. 47–60.

Riesman, David. "Some Observations on Intellectual Freedom," *The American Scholar,* XXIII (Winter 1953–54), 15ff.

Smith, Paul. "Criticism and the Curriculum II," *College English,* XXIV (October 1964), p. 30–37.

Spiller, Robert E. "Is Literary History Obsolete?" *College English,* XXIV (February 1963), p. 345–51.

Witt, Marion. "Great Art Beaten Down: William Butler Yeats on Censorship," *College English,* XIII (February 1952), p. 248–58.

●●●